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ABSTRACT

Ever since it was first written into the new nation's Constitution in 1950, achieving universal elementary education has proven an elusive goal for India. This book examines the failure of the Operation Blackboard scheme to establish a minimum norm of essential facilities for primary schools but argues that, in spite of its failure, the scheme has been rich in important policy lessons. The book considers two in particular. First, the prevailing view of implementation, highly centralized and top-down, was deeply flawed. Central directives met with active opposition or passive resistance when key stakeholders at other levels were not drawn into policy dialogues. Second, teachers are central to meaningful educational change and must understand the hows and whys of changes if they are to implement them. Historically, all policy documents have reiterated the importance of teachers to meaningful educational change. The first four chapters show in various ways that this has not been addressed in practice or in theory. Many examples focus on rural village schools. Chapter 5 describes a primary teacher culture with low motivation and lack of accountability towards children; supporting improvements to this culture remains a key challenge for educational managers at all levels. Although there are now new structures that did not exist when Operation Blackboard was launched, professional cultures are well established and hard to change. Appendices present mapping routes of the case study and minimum essential classroom equipment provided under Operation Blackboard. (Contains 144 references.) (TD)

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